

# World Baseball Classic: Pool D - Venezuela vs Puerto Rico

Sunday, 12 March, 2023

Miami, Florida, USA

LoanDepot Park

## Team Venezuela

### Pablo Lopez

#### Postgame Press Conference

Venezuela 9, Puerto Rico 6

**Q. Pablo, you came back home the best possible way. What do you feel when they didn't let you finish the fifth inning? What was the emotion?**

PABLO LOPEZ: Actually, yes, the emotions were a little high. Physically I was feeling okay, and I was looking forward to play. Not because I was nervous, but because I was excited because of this opportunity. I know what it means to wear the Venezuelan jersey. I was very proud. I was looking forward to play. I wanted to go onto the field with my teammates. Even before that we scored four runs with that kind of offensive support. Of course, my job was easier.

Now, I just wanted to execute, to attack, to dominate the hitters. Of course, the offensive support continued. So my job was even easier. I was having fun. I was just going to go out to locate the pitches, and that's it.

**Q. Starting with four runs in advance, it's a great advantage, but maybe you were able to be more aggressive against the Puerto Rican hitters, or you stuck to the plan? Is this the best atmosphere you have played in your career?**

PABLO LOPEZ: Of course, the four runs were important, of course. The pitching plan was to attack, but after the four runs, of course, I really wanted to attack. It's a good feeling as a starting pitcher, we score, they don't score. This is the kind of mindset that helps you continue attacking without giving opportunities to the opponent.

If you are convinced, if you have that mindset, if you try to force a bad swing and to have a good count in your favor, to use your repertoire in a different situations, that was great. I have no words to describe that.

I was warming up. I was thinking about that. I felt the



energy when they were announcing the lineups. The noise, you know, the adrenaline that everyone told me about in the World Series or people that participated in the World Classic. That is now part of my experience. Actually, it's a beautiful feeling.

**Q. How important do you think these two wins have been for the country of Venezuela and the fans, especially with everything going on in the country right now?**

PABLO LOPEZ: It's been huge. It's been six years in the making from the last WBC edition. So we were eager for this weekend to come. We knew on paper these two were the toughest matchups, but at the same time it's the most fun challenge, you know. Super challenging. We as athletes like to be challenged. We like to be put on the spot and in uncomfortable situations because that's where you grow. That's where you grow as an athlete, as a person. To be able bring this little bit of joy and happiness to the people back home, it's a little extra motivation for us, you know.

We're here just not representing ourselves as individuals, but an entire community, the next generation of players, and then it's a wonderful feeling. I really can't describe it. I get goosebumps thinking about it because it's just very surreal.

**Q. Out of many emotions, many people wearing the jersey, how present was your father on the mound with you?**

PABLO LOPEZ: Oh, ever since I woke up, my mom and my father were present. One on the left shoulder, and the other one on the right shoulder. It's a great feeling. I live that, but so many times in my career I was very motivated. I felt that I had what I needed to go out to the mound, and I was well prepared.

I did what I did. I was able to control what I could control, made good pitches, and if I had some help from the heavens, I am thankful for that.

**Q. Those words that Omar Lopez told you when he took you out, what did he tell you? On the other hand,**

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**was it a benefit for you to know this ballpark because you played here for a while?**

PABLO LOPEZ: When I saw him coming to the mound, I didn't have anything to say. I knew what his intention was. I didn't try to convince the manager. I know that he had his decision already made, and I understand that.

It's a very important tournament. It's an extension of the preparation for the season that is so intense and long. I understand his decision, of course. You think that you are in season in June or July with 120 pitches, but that's not the case. It's a decision that is based on the characteristics of this tournament.

And, yes, I'm very familiar with this mound and this ballpark. It feels like it is my mound, my mound. I haven't pitched in Minnesota yet. So yes, I felt comfortable on that mound. My job was to execute pitches and try to dominate the lineup from Puerto Rico that is so good.

**Q. Pablo, how about Salvador Perez? First time that you played with him, and you looked like you have been working together forever.**

PABLO LOPEZ: All the Venezuelan pitchers know what Salvador Perez means, his leadership, how he communicates with the pitchers. We had a meeting before the game, and he asked me all the questions, questions about Pablo Lopez as a pitcher, as a person, and building that relationship, which is more intimate, that is closer and off the field makes him very special. Building that relationship helps you navigate through different situations of the game where you have to use different pitches or different levels of intensity and conviction.

So he took his time, and I was happy for that. We talked about certain situations. We spoke about pitches, control, and that helped me a lot.

I realized, first of all, that I was talking to Salvador Perez, and then I realized what he did at the plate with his offense. He is a superstar.

**Q. How did it feel to get back on the mound here in Miami, a place you called home for many years?**

OMAR LOPEZ: Still very familiar with the mound. Obviously, I've worked on this before. So nothing new because sometimes when you show up to new places, obviously, you know it's not crooked, but it looks crooked sometimes. Obviously, this one I'm super familiar with it.

I really don't think it played an advantage, but in my mind it was a little bit, you know? I know how to navigate this

mound. I know how to navigate the ballpark, the environment. So I think the only difference is I was coming from the first base dugout rather than the third base dugout.

But I think it made my job easier. One less thing to worry about. I was just worrying about executing my pitches.

**Q. Pablo, you were talking about the energy that you felt. You threw a 97-mile-an-hour fastball in the first inning. It is March 12th. I don't think you've ever thrown 97 on March 12th before. How do you balance what it means playing for your country with the fact that you've got six months left of baseball after this?**

PABLO LOPEZ: Yeah, obviously I think adrenaline played a big part into the intensity and the speed of some pitches, but I also knew that this opportunity, this event was happening, so I took my preparation very seriously. I took into account that even though these are starts, we're still building up. The intensely level is not going to be the same.

I threw nearly 60 pitches that were very high intensity. I did start my preparation earlier, taking that into account because I knew what I was going to ask of myself because I'm representing my country because I'm in this kind of environment.

So I knew I was going to ask of myself that intensity, so I prepared my body and my mind for that. I started my preparation earlier. I showed up to Spring Training already with two live BPs under my belt. I've never done that before.

Usually when you show up to Spring Training you throw two bullpens, and then you move onto live BP. I showed up with two live BPs because I knew getting the head start was going to play a big role.

It's a fun event. You want to have fun, but at the same time you have to think of the six months of the season. 32 starts, hopefully more in the playoffs. You do have to take that into consideration.

So I think being mindful really helped me, and then just tonight I was able to ask myself of that intensity to help my team, and I'm happy that it worked out.

**Q. Puerto Rico just couldn't hit your pitches. What was your specific plan to face that lineup? Have you identified something that you could control or take advantage of? We call the Twins "the Bori Twins" because there are many Boricua players there. Have you talked to them?**

PABLO LOPEZ: Yes, I was able to talk to many of them -- Pagan, Lopez, Moran, De León, Christian Vazquez, Correa. When I met in the clubhouse, we talked a lot. We knew on Sunday that we had this game. We didn't know if I was to pitch this game or not, but yes, the thoughts and the discussions were already there.

So when we get back to camp, we are going to have a great relationship. It's a lineup that they have that you have to be focused on all the time, and each pitch. Many players that you are you not familiar with, you just try to execute your pitches and to be a little bit unpredictable for them.

So the key things was to try to attack, to dominate, and control the count and to use your repertoire in different situations. If you are behind in the count, you are more susceptible. You have to throw a fastball trying to control the plate. Not only selecting the pitches, but also to locate them and execute them correctly.

Salvador Perez was a great help. I hadn't faced some of them, and he told me, take it easy. I know them. He told me a lot.

Thank you. Thank you.

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